

Environmental Justice Coalition for Water

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Mr. Dabbs,

The Environmental Justice Coalition for Water (EJCW) is a coalition made up of over 60 community-based and non-profit organizations throughout California, working on water issues impacting low-income and people of color communities both urban and rural. We work to ensure the specific needs of these communities are acknowledged and addressed in water management and long term water planning in California. We respectfully submit the following comments on the California Water Plan Update 2005.

Outreach & Public Participation

In the 2005 California Water Plan Update process, DWR clearly spent resources on facilitators, workshops around the state, and phone-in sessions. However the EJCW feels that these efforts did not guarantee meaningful public participation. More resources should have been spent on targeted outreach to communities rather than complex workshops with professional facilitators and agency staff. The turn-out for the phone-in sessions were extremely low. Calling in on a toll-free number is a great way to engage low-income and geographically remote stakeholders, yet the upfront outreach to get participation was lacking. In the future we recommend:

- Better outreach to targeted/specific disadvantaged, low-income and underrepresented communities to participate in the workshops and phone-ins.
- Better distribution of the report before the workshops.
- Refer to the CalEPA EJ Action Plan recommendations for meaningful public participation.
- Measure the amount of non-profit or community based organizations represented at the public workshops and increase representation of these underrepresented stakeholders.

Inclusion of Environmental Justice Issues

Overall we are pleased at the direction the California Water Plan Update has taken; the report includes a broad approach to water management that includes drinking water, aging infrastructure and economic analysis. While some argue that the purpose of the water plan is focus narrowly on water supply with the end result being a gap number, EJCW embraces a broader approach that is more holistic. Though much of the background text and goals of the Strategic Plan hint at a broad, inclusive approach, the recommendations are weak and lack tangible ways to accomplish these goals.

We would like to see a more explicit goal regarding Environmental Justice, such as:

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Ensure all Californians, including low-income communities and people of color, have access to clean, reliable and affordable water for drinking, recreation and fish consumption

- The specific water needs of small, rural communities should be incorporated into Recommendations 1-5.

Recommendation 3 – Improve Water Quality

Action Plan

- *Agencies must allocate a portion of their budgets for technical assistance to low-income and people of color communities with drinking water problems.*

Recommendation 4 – Maintain and Improve Aging Statewide Water Infrastructure

Improvements to aging water infrastructure should take priority over building new water supply structures. Rural, low-income communities are especially overlooked when infrastructure projects are funded.

Action Plan

- *DWR will replenish funds for its Infrastructure Rehabilitation Program and ensure that the neediest communities have access to funding opportunities for this purpose.*

Recommendation 13 – Increase Tribal Participation and Access to Funding

Action Plan

- *The needs and concerns of California Tribes both federally recognized and unrecognized will take priority over decisions to build new dams or enlarge existing dams.*

Recommendation 14 – Ensure Environmental Justice across All Communities

Action Plan

- *DWR will adopt the CALFED EJ Subcommittee's proposed workplan.2004*
- *DWR will provide participation stipends and travel stipends to ensure representation from low-income and people of color stakeholders.*
- *Ensure all Californians, including low-income communities and people of color, have access to clean, reliable and affordable water for drinking, recreation and fish consumption*

Thank you,

Alisha Deen
Legislative Analyst